

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Pryor Mountain Travel Management Area

DOI-BLM-MT-C010-2019-0029-EA

April 2021

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an Environmental Analysis (EA) (DOI-BLM-MT-C010-2019-0029-EA) for a Proposed Action and No Action alternative to address travel and transportation management in the Billings Field Office Pryor Mountain Travel Management Area (TMA). The TMA is located south of the Pryor Mountains along the border between Montana and Wyoming and encompasses 80,711.2 acres of BLM-administered land, with interspersed private and State land. The TMA includes lands in both Carbon County, Montana and Big Horn County, Wyoming. The draft Proposed Action released in October 2019 was selected from a range of reasonable alternatives to address the relevant travel and transportation planning issues identified in the RMP/FEIS. In response to public comments on the 2019 Draft EA/TMP, and additional public input on the 2020 Draft EA/TMP, BLM updated the Proposed Action, and carried it forward in the final TMP/EA.

The final TMP designates a system of roads, primitive roads, and trails, totaling approximately 250 miles, to provide access to public lands for multiple-use activities. Under the plan, routes are designated as Open, Limited, or Closed to motorized and mechanized uses. Route designations were made following intensive on-the-ground inventories, resource evaluations, and public input. The TMP also outlines actions that would be taken to implement route designations, including signage, restoration, and public information. Plan implementation would ensure continued access to public lands, while minimizing impacts to wildlife species and habitats, reducing conflicts among recreationists and other users, and preventing damage to cultural and heritage resources.

Finding of No Significant Impact Determination

Based on a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the Proposed Action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No anticipated environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27. Further, the effects identified in the EA are consistent with the effects previously described in the Billings Approved Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/FEIS) (BLM 2015a) and associated Appendix O of the RMP (the Travel Management Plan [TMP]).

Context

The Proposed Action would incorporate design features, best management practices, and other minimization measures to avoid any significant impacts to biological, cultural, or other resources within, or adjacent to, the TMA (Section 2.5, EA). Overall, the effects expected from implementation of the Proposed Action are localized, minor in intensity, and not measurable at the State or regional scale.

Intensity

The following discussion is organized around the ten significance criteria described in 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1508.27 and incorporated into resources and issues considered in the EA

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(1)).

The EA provides a description of the potential effects from implementation of the Proposed Action. Guidance contained in 43 CFR 8342.1 outlines considerations for minimizing impacts to resources, as well as impacts due to user-conflict and safety. The EA identifies both beneficial and adverse impacts that would result from the proposed actions.

Beneficial effects of implementation of this decision include:

- The additional of non-motorized and non-mechanized trails provides enhanced opportunities for primitive recreation activities. Although there are numerous opportunities for non-motorized/non-mechanized recreation off-trail throughout the TMA, these trail designations are located in areas that are easily accessible by passenger vehicles and suitable for all skill levels.
- The proposed route closures will protect sensitive biological and cultural resources, reduce habitat fragmentation and route density, and further protect wilderness characteristics. Route closures focus on redundant and dead-end routes, or routes previously designated as Limited to Administrative or Authorized uses, as well as some routes where direct impacts to cultural or natural resources were identified.

Adverse effects due to implementation of the proposed actions would include:

- Closure of routes previously used by motorized users would impact vehicular access to localized areas within the TMA. In most cases, access is served by alternate routes.

2. The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2)).

The Proposed Action would result in improved public health and safety by providing a logical system of routes and increased user-information, both on- and off-site. The implementation plan (Appendix B of the TMP/EA) details how BLM will mark and otherwise designate roads and trails on the ground, which will help avoid visitor confusion and non-compliance with route designations. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant effects to public health and safety.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3)).

Several special designations have been established within the TMA to protect sensitive resources and uses, including the Pryor Mountain Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA); East Pryor Mountain, Petroglyph Canyon, and Pryor Foothills Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), lands with wilderness characteristics, and two segments of Crooked Creek eligible for Wild and Scenic River designation.

The purposes of these areas are to provide for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of habitat and of the scientific, cultural, and educational resources and values associated with their designation. The Proposed Action would provide minor benefits to areas of special designation through route closures, use restrictions, and other measures. The EA documented no major effects on unique characteristics.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)).

Based on public comment, internal discussion, and the analysis of the alternatives, the effects on the human environment are not considered to be highly controversial and are not likely to become so over the life of this plan. Controversy, in this context, refers to any potential scientific controversy regarding the impacts of travel decisions, not disagreement on the decision.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5)).

The Proposed Action is not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas. The potential environmental effects are fully analyzed in the EA. There are no predicted effects to the environment that are considered highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Travel management actions, such as those described in the EA, are not new or unique, and have been successfully implemented in previous travel plans.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6)).

The TMA TMP does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. The BLM is directed to prepare TMPs and the actions analyzed in this EA have been successfully implemented elsewhere. Approval of these activities in no way assumes

approval of any future activities. Any proposed future activities not identified in the EA must be evaluated on their own merits and their effects must be analyzed.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)).

The interdisciplinary team evaluated the possible actions in the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. An analysis of cumulative effects was conducted in the EA and no significant cumulative impacts were identified. In general, impacts would be reduced from current conditions as redundant routes are closed or further limited through the travel management implementation process. Ongoing impacts will also be reduced through signage, enforcement, and monitoring that helps gain compliance with the proposed designations. Incremental beneficial impacts would result from designation and implementation of a comprehensive travel network, meeting both current and future access needs to the public lands in this area, while minimizing effects on sensitive resources.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)).

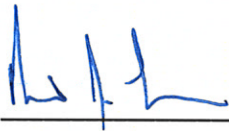
The Proposed Action will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in, or eligible for, listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. BLM has consulted with the State Historic Preservation Officer as part of the travel management planning process and has developed a Programmatic Agreement (PA) for further evaluation of cultural resources. As part of the PA, additional inventories may be conducted to identify historic properties.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)).

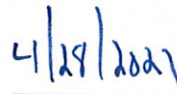
There are no documented occurrences of plant or animal species listed under the Endangered Species Act within the TMA, and there is no designated critical habitat in the TMA. The proposed action would not adversely affect endangered or threatened species and would not affect critical habitat. The proposed action would not contribute to a need to list any BLM sensitive species under the Endangered Species Act.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of a federal, state, local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10)).

The Proposed Action does not violate any Federal, State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. State, local, and tribal interests were given the opportunity to participate throughout the planning process. The Billings Field Office sent letters to the Blackfeet Nation, Chippewa Cree Tribe, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Crow Tribe of Indians, Fort Belknap Indian Community, Fort Peck Tribes, Little Shell Chippewa Tribe, and Northern Cheyenne Tribe offering consultation opportunities. Comments were received from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe, the Crow THPO, and the Northern Cheyenne THPO. In addition, the Proposed Action is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs.



Authorized Officer



Date

